

## Chapter 5

The wand ceremony, on a postgrad level, was catered to non-incantas. Incantas already got their wands when they started school – primary school. And not all of them required one.

Wands were a tool to channel a being's inner magic into their external surroundings. All creatures had magic in them, but pure-bred witches, wizards, and fairies were able to cast spells without a wand. Some half-breeds could manage without one as well, but their ability was dependent on nothing more than a chance at birth.

"Hey, slept well, you two?" Liam appeared, strode past the gawking and giggling undergraduates two lines down, and appeared by his cousins' side.

"I did," Reida said. "I doubt Ianne slept more than an hour at a time."

"I didn't want to oversleep."

"Or," Reida began, "you couldn't wait to get a wand."

"Just like your cousin here, then," Theo said, emerging from behind in the same purple suit. "I don't have werewolf or lycan hearing and even I was woken up by his restlessness the night before his wand ceremony."

"You're an extremely light sleeper," Liam argued.

"No, you're just very loud with the way you wake," Theo remarked, not for the first time. It was clear this was a common topic for bickering between them. Despite his best efforts in restraining himself, Theo's eyes trailed to the princess. "Your Highness," he greeted with a nod and smile. Turning to Ianne, he continued, "My I—"

Before Reida and Ianne could stop him, Liam chided, "Your Highness? Really? What are you going to call me from now on? My lord?"

"Not even if you want me to."

"Look, she's not even in your class yet. She's just Reida. Right, Ri?"

"Ri," Theo mouthed, something in that syllable weaved something in his chest, channelling an unfamiliar warmth through his veins.

"Yes," Reida replied to her cousin's question. "Though I did mention it yesterday."

"Did you?" Liam questioned, not recalling it.

"We met – by accident – before your introduction," Theo quickly explained.

A modicum of betrayal crept into Liam's eyes. "How? When?"

"Reida was judging me for reading a book upside down," Theo explained.

"I was not!" Reida interjected. "I only asked."

Theo's lips tipped the same way they did the previous day after riling her up while Liam cracked his head, and when realization lit his eyes, he whispered, "That book?"

"The one you destroyed when I saved you? Yes, Liam. Thatbook," Theo responded wryly.

"You didn't 'save' me. I was not in danger."

"But I was, after you punch me."

"You asked for it."

"The only thing I asked was for you to doubt everyone before trusting anyone."

Their interaction prompted Ianne to lean closer to Reida and whisper, "They're a bit like Dad and Uncle Greg."

Or her own father and Uncle Greg, Reida thought, though Theo smiled more than their uncle did.

"Everything with the professor alright?" Reida asked.

Theo was momentarily lost until comprehension hit him like a dart to the eye. His jaw clenched when his hands went behind his back, hiding his clenched fists. "Yes, it's... resolved."

Reida's sights slid to Liam, who gave her a look that discouraged her from asking more. She could, but how was she going to change the subject seamlessly, not desperately?

Ianne decided to intervene, pointing at a random jar on one of the two door-to-ceiling shelves they would be walking through for the wand ceremony and asked, "What are those?"

She didn't even know what she was pointing at.

"Which one?" Theo asked, brows knitting.

"Uh, that yellowish-gray blob thingy swimming in green," Ianne nally picked. Reida squeezed her arm and linked her a quick thanks.

"Oh, it's called a wolley rewolf – a ower that's deceptively sweet like honey and as deathly as a vein-popping poison."

Ianne reeled, as did some of their peers who were within earshot.

"That's an ingredient to make a wand?" Reida questioned, incredulity coating her voice.

The quirk returned to Theo's lips. "What a world we live in, isn't it, Reida?"

Reida.

Hundreds, if not thousands, have called her Reida, from her family to teachers to classmates throughout her education journey. Yet they all sounded the same. The way Theo said it was like he was casting a spell.

Was that why he felt it was forbidden to say it when she told him to? Did Liam's insistence at addressing her by her first name become a protective shield that prevented the spell from working on her? Was the spell working at all? Because her neck and cheeks were burning in a way that was unusual.

"Reida, you okay?" Liam asked when she went still and silent, his question turning Theo's smile to a concerned frown.

"Yeah. Yeah, of course. Just the... excitement of getting..." She waved at the shelves lled with pickled jars and small, opened chests made from either metal or wood. "...the ingredients for the wand."

Liam relaxed at this but Theo didn't. The wizard was not easily convinced. He was going to ask if she was truly okay but Professor Dnaw stepped in and waved him and Liam forward since they'd be assisting in recording the ingredients.

"Good luck," Liam muttered to his cousins with a double thumbs-up and an enthusiastic smile before marching forward.

Theo held Reida's gaze, unsmiling. "If you don't feel well, let us know, alright? The ceremony can be done on any other day."

As she prayed that Theo truly didn't have wolf or lycan hearing to catch the increasing palpitations of her heart, Reida pushed forward a smile. "I'm ne, really. Thank you, Theo."

A single, rapid blink gave away his shock at hearing the sound of his name coming from her lips. A jolt like an arrow to the heart had him subtly jerking back. It was the same word made up of the same letters. How was she able to say it differently?

"Theodore, if you're ready, we'd like to begin."

Theo's gaze shot to the front, and he began making his way there. "My apologies, Professor."

Little did he know, both Reida's and Ianne's ears caught the hammering of his own heart before he left their side.